

Chapter 1

It was Friday, April 17th, and Boulder Detectives Caroline Shaw and Tom Nichols were having lunch in their usual booth at the Village Coffee Shop in downtown Boulder, Colorado. Nichols noticed Shaw was being unusually quiet.

“You’re not your usual talkative self today,” said Nichols.

“Oh, sorry,” replied Shaw. “I was thinking about the two-year anniversary coming up of us finding Melanie Quinn’s body along Boulder Creek at Eben G. Fine Park. This place reminds me of that day. This is where you brought me for lunch right after we found her.”

“Hmmm, I hadn’t thought about that,” responded Nichols. “That was in May, right?”

“Yeah, May 9th to be exact. It’s not a case I’ll ever completely get over.”

“I understand. Since you brought it up, have you spoken to Della Kemp recently?”

“No. The last time I talked to Della was about eight months ago. She said she was doing well but was still in some therapy.”

As they were talking, Nichols' favorite waitress, the motherly-looking Mary, with her pink apron, walked over to the table and asked if there was anything else she could get for them.

"No, we're good," replied Shaw. "Thank you."

She then looked at her cell phone. "I just got a text from the commander. We have a missing person's report to look into. Let's get back to the office."

The drive to the Boulder Police Department on 33rd Street only took about six minutes. When Shaw and Nichols arrived, they met with Commander Stella Greenberg in her first-floor office in the Detective Bureau.

"What's up?" asked Nichols as they entered the office.

"I'm not sure it's anything right now," said fifty-six-year-old Commander Greenberg. "Patrol took a phone report from a woman's father by the name of Gary Cortez. He said his twenty-two-year-old daughter, Mia Cortez, was supposed to meet him for breakfast this morning but didn't show up. He hasn't been able to contact her."

"A twenty-two-year-old woman doesn't meet her father for breakfast, and she's a missing person?" asked Nichols with a frown.

"Did patrol even take a report?" asked Shaw.

"Mr. Cortez was adamant that his daughter wouldn't have stood him up for breakfast. He drove from Loveland to Boulder, and she never showed up.

Mr. Cortez then went to her apartment and couldn't get an answer at the door. He also said he couldn't find her car in the parking lot."

"Did patrol try to enter the apartment?" asked Nichols.

"They knocked on her door and left a note asking Mia to contact her dad, but didn't believe they had enough suspicion to break into her apartment," advised Greenberg.

"My guess is she shackled up with some guy she met at a bar last night," huffed Nichols.

"Possibly," agreed Greenberg. "But I'd like you to go there and see if you can get someone to answer the door, or find a landlord who can let you in for a welfare check."

"We can do that," replied Shaw.

"Thank you," said Greenberg.

As they left the commander's office, Nichols turned to Shaw. "Isn't this something patrol could do?"

"Sure, but patrol already tried this morning. It won't take long to check it out."

"I suppose not," agreed Nichols.

In twenty minutes, Shaw and Nichols were at an apartment complex near Folsom and Walnut in the heart of Boulder, knocking on the door of Mia Cortez. No one came to the door. The note an officer left was still on the door.

Nichols walked around the complex and found an on-site office. However, it was already closed for the weekend. An emergency phone number was posted in the window, and Nichols dialed the number. A woman answered, and Nichols explained the situation.

“I can be there in fifteen minutes,” said Sharon McLane, an assistant manager for the complex.

“Thank you,” replied Nichols. He then rejoined Shaw.

“Do you think we’re going to find a dead body in there?” asked Nichols, half-joking.

“Not likely. She’s a twenty-two-year-old college woman. She probably just forgot about breakfast with Dad.”

After approximately twenty minutes had passed, Sharon McLane, a dark-haired thirty-something woman with a pale complexion, met the detectives at the door. After they exchanged a few pleasantries, McLane handed Shaw a master key. Shaw inserted the key and slowly opened the door. As she did so, Shaw called out Mia’s name and announced herself as the Boulder Police.

As the detectives entered the apartment, they both continued calling out for Mia. Shaw noticed that the bathroom door was open and the light was on, illuminating the hallway. As she got to the bathroom, Shaw carefully looked into the room. The bathroom was empty.

The detectives continued their search in the only bedroom. There was no sign of Mia Cortez, nor of any struggle or criminal behavior. They did note that the bed had not been made. After clearing the apartment, Shaw thanked McLane for her assistance.

“I hope everything is okay,” stated McLane.

“Most likely it is,” replied Shaw. “Dad was worried that she didn’t show up for breakfast today. She probably just forgot.”

“That’s good to hear. The phone call scared me.”

“I didn’t mean to scare you,” answered Nichols.

“No, it’s okay. I’m glad nothing bad happened.”

On the way back to the police department, Shaw asked Nichols for his thoughts.

Nichols chuckled, “It’s a big nothing burger. She’s probably out with friends enjoying her weekend.”

Shaw nodded in agreement.

Back at the station, Shaw updated the commander.

“Well, I’m glad it appears to be nothing at this point,” replied Commander Greenberg. “If Mia doesn’t show up in another day or two, then I’ll get concerned. Have you told her dad yet?”

“No, but I’ll call him and let him know we found nothing suspicious or out of order.”

Commander Greenberg nodded. “Thanks, Caro.”

Caro was the shortened name Shaw preferred to be called. Not Caroline or Carol with the l at the end.

It was Caro, the shortened name her father had always used.

When Shaw called Gary Cortez to tell him they found nothing suspicious at Mia's apartment, he was not happy. He insisted something had to be wrong, that Mia would not have forgotten about breakfast.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Cortez. We don't have enough information right now. If your daughter doesn't show up this weekend, we will begin a more intense investigation."

"If she doesn't show up, it will probably be too late. Don't you people even care?"

"Yes, we do care, Mr. Cortez. We have nothing to go on right now. Do you have any idea where she might have been last night?"

"Mia told me she was going out dancing with some friends on the Pearl Street Mall."

"That helps," replied Shaw. "Do you know who she was with?"

"No, I don't."

"Does Mia have a car?"

"Yes," replied Cortez. "She has a white Hyundai Elantra. It's about five years old."

"Okay, we'll continue to have patrol look for her, the car, and check with the bars on Pearl Street."

"Thank you," replied Cortez in a softened voice.

It was 4:30 in the afternoon, and Detective Nichols was preparing to leave for the weekend when he received a call from Patrol Officer Weston.

“I have a young woman who says she was with Mia Cortez last night at the Star Light dance bar on Pearl Street, and she saw Mia arguing with a man. Now, she can’t find Mia. Do you want to talk to her?”

Crap, thought Nichols. *I was just about ready to leave for the weekend.* After a pause, he replied.

“Yes, bring her in.”

Nichols walked over to Shaw’s desk and told her what he knew. “Do you want to interview her with me?”

“Of course. You don’t think I trust you to do one by yourself, do you?”

Nichols smiled. “Funny.”

At 4:45 pm, Shaw and Nichols were sitting in an interview room with Cathy Coats, a twenty-one-year-old white female with a tan complexion and long dark hair, wearing a blue blouse. Coats looked around, surprised by how stark and bland the interview room was. She noticed a camera pointed at her from the opposite corner.

“This looks like one of those rooms you see on police TV shows,” quipped Coats.

Detective Shaw simply smiled, then said, “Cathy, tell us what you know about Mia Cortez.”

“Well, Mia is a friend of mine,” said Coats. “We both go to the University of Colorado. I was at the Star Light bar on Pearl Street Thursday night, dancing with some friends. While I was there, I saw Mia. She was dancing with a guy I know as Jack Brewer.”

“Just to be clear, you’re talking about the Star Light bar in the 1000 block of Pearl Street, just west of the Pearl Street Mall, correct?”

“Yes, that’s the one,” answered Coats.

“Is that all you observed?” asked Shaw.

“No. Later, I saw the two of them near the front door, and they appeared to be having an argument.”

“Mia was having an argument with a man named Jack Brewer?” repeated Shaw.

“Yes.”

“Could you hear what the argument was about?”

“No. I wasn’t close, and the music was very loud.”

“Okay, just tell me what you observed,” continued Shaw.

“Jack seemed angry about something. At one point, I saw him grab Mia’s right arm. He was saying something to her, but I couldn’t hear him. Mia pulled her arm away and walked out the door. Jack followed her and didn’t look very happy.”

“Did you see where they went?”

“No, I stayed inside the club.”

“How do you know Mia?” asked Shaw.

“I met her at the university. We’ve had some classes together and sometimes party together.”

“And how do you know Jack Brewer?”

“He’s someone who likes to hang out at the dance clubs in town. He seems to know a lot of people.”

“Is he a student at the university?” asked Nichols.

“No. I believe Jack works on motorcycles somewhere. I know he has a red motorcycle. But he does share a place with two college students.”

“Do you know where he lives?” continued Nichols.

“Somewhere in the Goss–Grove area with two other guys,” replied Coats.

“Can you show us where he lives?” asked Shaw.

“No. I just know Jack lives somewhere in that area. I’ve never been there. One of the guys he lives with is a Mexican guy, Bobby Flores.”

“Was Bobby Flores with Jack Brewer last night?”

“I didn’t see him at the club.”

Shaw continued, “Do you believe Jack Brewer has something to do with Mia Cortez being missing?”

“Well, I don’t know, but I did see them together, and it looked like they were arguing.”

“Can you describe Jack Brewer for us?”

“Sure. Jack is a little older than most of us and has long brown hair that hangs to just above his shoulders.”

“Is he a white male?” asked Shaw.

“Yes. And he often wears a black leather jacket and jeans. He also rides a motorcycle.”

“How tall would you say he is?”

“Somewhere around six feet.”

“Is he thin, heavy?”

“Jack is thin.”

“To confirm,” said Shaw, “you believe Jack Brewer and Mia Cortez were having an argument Thursday night at the Star Light bar.”

“That’s correct,” replied Coats.

“Is there anything else you can think of to tell us?”

“No. It’s just unusual for Mia to be missing. None of her friends I’ve talked to have seen her since last night.”

“Do you remember what Mia was wearing?”

“Yes, she had on a red dress. She also had a white jeans jacket.”

“Thank you for coming in, Cathy. We’ll do what we can to find Mia,” assured Shaw.

After Cathy Coats left, Shaw instructed Nichols to contact Gary Cortez with an update and let him know the police were now treating the case as a legitimate missing-persons case.

“In the meantime, I’ll get a listing on Mia’s car and put out a missing person bulletin to patrol along with information on Jack Brewer as a person of interest,” said Shaw.

“Got it,” replied Nichols. “Are you staying late?”

“No. Once we’ve sent the information to patrol and the Sheriff’s Department, I’m going home for the weekend. Until someone finds Mr. Brewer or Mia Cortez, there’s not much else for us to do.”

“Good. I was hoping you would say that. I’ve got a big day with family tomorrow,” replied Nichols.

The mall that Detective Shaw referred to is the Pearl Street Mall located in the heart of downtown Boulder. This outdoor pedestrian mall spans four blocks between 11th and 15th Streets. Wide, red-brick walkways, flower beds, trees, and public art fill the center of the open mall. It is not unusual to find musicians, magicians, and other buskers performing for tips, especially in the evenings and on weekends. Shops along the mall include restaurants, some with outdoor patios, boutiques, specialty retailers, and bookstores. The mall attracts locals, tourists, and University of Colorado students, all seeking entertainment. It also attracts its fair share of transients who spend much of their time hiding their drinking and pot smoking from the police.

Just west of the mall are two more blocks of restaurants, bars and shops. The Star Light Bar is located in the first block west of the mall. It is a popular attraction for the younger generation.

Later that evening, at the midnight shift patrol briefing, the sergeant was reading the missing person's bulletin put out by Detective Shaw. Jack Brewer was listed as a person of interest who was last seen at the Star Light bar arguing with the missing female, twenty-two-year-old Mia Cortez.

Fifty-three-year-old Officer Alan Reynolds listened closely. Reynolds knew Brewer from a previous run-in three years earlier. Brewer had been asked to leave the Last Stop Tavern on Pearl Street, a

popular bar with locals and visitors. Brewer created a disturbance and intentionally broke some glasses by throwing them on the floor, resulting in the police being called. Officer Reynolds was one of the responding officers. As Reynolds attempted to arrest Brewer for criminal mischief, Brewer resisted by swinging his arms. As he did so, Reynolds was hit in the mouth by Brewer's left elbow, which cut Reynolds' lower lip and the inside of his cheek. Brewer later pleaded guilty to criminal mischief and misdemeanor assault. He served four months in the Boulder County Jail, a sentence Reynolds believed was too lenient for assaulting an officer. Since that incident, Officer Reynolds had stopped Brewer on two occasions when he saw him riding his Harley-Davidson motorcycle in town. In both stops, Reynolds issued a ticket for a petty traffic offense.

Officer Reynolds raised his hand. The sergeant called on him, "What is it, Alan?"

"I know this guy. He drives a red Harley-Davidson and used to live in Louisville, but I think he lives in Boulder now. I'll look for him this weekend."

"Great," replied the sergeant. "I want everyone to be on the lookout. If you find him, call either Detective Shaw or Nichols. They'll probably want to interview him about this missing woman."

Alan Reynolds was a veteran officer with the Boulder Police Department, having served for 27 years. Over the years, in addition to patrol, Reynolds

had worked various assignments, including a three-year stint as a property detective and four years in undercover narcotics. He loved working undercover, but was transferred out of narcotics after using excessive force on one of the dealers. It was not the only time he was accused of excessive force, but it was the only time the department could prove it and discipline him. While Reynolds, a white male with salt-and-pepper hair, had put on some weight over the years, he was still strong and stood at 6'2". He wore a thick mustache, and several tattoos adorned his right arm.

After the briefing, Officer Reynolds ran a records check on Jack Brewer. Initially, no record of Jack Brewer was found. However, a record came up for Eugene Jack Brewer with a history of multiple arrests, including the Last Stop Tavern incident from three years ago.

Ah, yes, remembered Reynolds; *Jack is his middle name. His first name is Eugene.* Reynolds then ran a driver's license check, and the address for Eugene Jack Brewer came back to a Louisville, Colorado, address, a small commuter city just several miles east of Boulder.

Officer Reynolds then sent a request to the Louisville Police Department to check the address in Louisville for Eugene or Jack Brewer. Approximately an hour later, Reynolds was notified that no one with that name currently lived at the Louisville address.

I didn't think so, thought Reynolds. That asshole is living here in Boulder. Reynolds remembered that Jack Brewer used to live somewhere in central Boulder. I'm going to find him. Maybe I can still find this missing woman alive.

Officer Reynolds spent the rest of the night looking for Brewer and his red Harley-Davidson motorcycle without success.

Like most officers, Detective Caroline Shaw lived outside of Boulder, where housing was more affordable. She owned a two-bedroom condo in Longmont, a town approximately 15 miles northeast of Boulder. Shaw was home watching the ten o'clock news when her phone rang. It was swing-shift Officer Mick Collier.

"Hey, Mick, what's up?" answered Shaw.

"Not much. I saw the bulletin you put out today."

"Did you find our missing woman?"

"No, not yet. I was calling to see if you are up for dinner tomorrow?"

"Uh, yeah. I don't have anything going on. Where are you taking me?"

"Well, you know I love Dave's Bar-B-Que."

Shaw chuckled. "I was hoping you would suggest Chinese."

"When have I ever suggested Chinese? You love bar-b-que."

"I like bar-b-que, but I love Chinese."

"I'm asking you to go to dinner, and I'm paying."

“Okay,” laughed Shaw. “Bar-b-que it is.”

“Great, I’ll pick you up at six o’clock tomorrow.”

“Thanks, Mick. See you then.”