

# Naked Evidence

# Naked Evidence

Crime Thrillers

Mark R Beckner

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## PREFACE

Having retired after 36 years of policing in Boulder, Colorado, I started writing fictional crime thrillers in 2021. While the stories are fictional, I rely on my law enforcement experiences to make them real and believable. After my first book, **Behind The Lies**, was published in early 2021, I received positive feedback and was encouraged to keep writing. My second book, **Death From Desire**, continued to receive positive reviews. I thought, so long as I believed I had good story ideas to work with, I would continue to write. Well, I believe I do. This book, **Naked Evidence**, comprises two crime thrillers, each one building from stories in my first and second books. Readers of my first two books will recognize Miami Detectives Rick Baez and Leah Mitchell in **Death From Desire**. In the second story, readers will recognize Chicago Detective Juan Garcia from **Behind the Lies**.

These stories are written for entertainment with a sense of realism. While none of the stories reflect actual crimes I investigated, ideas for each were cultivated from my investigative experience, and from cases I've studied. Studying real-life crime provides more than enough ideas for fictional stories. As with all my stories, I hope you enjoy the dramatic journey to solving the crime thrillers presented in this book.

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# **Naked Evidence**

# Chapter 1

It was a warm Wednesday morning in October, and Miami-Dade Metro Police Detective Rick Baez was doing his regular workout in the police weight room. Since returning to work after his injury and suspension, Baez made a vow to take better care of himself, both mentally and physically. His time away from work made him realize what was most important to him. He was still committed to his career as a detective but now understood the importance of having outside interests and maintaining his health through diet and exercise. Baez was about to finish lifting weights when his partner, Detective Leah Mitchell, walked in. Baez was wearing dark blue gym shorts and a tight-fitting, light blue polyester pullover shirt. Mitchell immediately noticed the muscle definition in Baez's arms and chest. She knew he had gotten serious about his health after his near-death experience, but this was the first time she had seen his body in revealing workout clothes.

"You've really gotten yourself in shape," said Mitchell.

"I'm trying," responded Baez. "What are you doing here?"

"Some kid found a body floating in the Buffer Preserve Area. We've been assigned the case."

"I'll jump in the shower and quickly change. Meet you in the office in about ten minutes."

Baez quickly showered, dried himself off, and got dressed. He left his shirt collar open and skipped the tie. He knew it would be hot and muggy at the crime scene. Baez met Mitchell at her desk in the Detective Bureau.

"Twelve minutes," said Mitchell. "Not bad."

"What do we know?" asked Baez.

"About an hour ago, a couple of kids found a body at the edge of one of the swamp ponds. We have officers and crime scene techs already at the scene. I've been told the body is already partially decomposed."

Baez squinted his eyes and wrinkled his nose. "Oh, I love these types of crime scenes. Better bring your Vicks. It will be a smelly scene."

Mitchell drove their white unmarked Ford Explorer to the scene on the east side of the Miami metropolitan area. The area, known as the East Coast Buffer Water Preserve Area, is a string of impoundments and restored wetlands used to manage the interface between the everglades and the metro area. Baez knew it would be wet and marshy.

Upon arrival, Mitchell and Baez retrieved rubber boots from the back of their vehicle and pulled them on. Baez left his jacket in the car. Both detectives gingerly walked toward the gathering of officers and crime scene investigators on the marsh's edge. The ground

beneath their feet felt mushier as they got closer. It was a humid October day, and the smell of wet marshlands filled the air. As Baez and Mitchell approached the scene, they could detect the odor of decayed flesh. Baez pulled out his tube of Vicks VapoRub and smeared a dab under his nose, then handed the tube to Mitchell. The menthol smell of Vicks helped to mask the stench of decay.

One of the uniformed officers led Baez and Mitchell to the edge of the marsh, where a naked body was lying partially submerged in water. It was the body of an adult male. The body was bloated and distorted, with the head submerged in water and the legs intertwined among the shoreline seaweed and lily pads. The heat and humidity quickly drew beads of sweat on Mitchell's and Baez's exposed arms and faces.

An officer informed Baez and Mitchell that two boys, aged 12 and 13, had found the body while trying to catch frogs. After interviewing them, the boys were released to their parents. It was apparent that the body had been in the water for several days.

CSIs (crime scene investigators) had completed their processing of the scene and were now awaiting the coroner's arrival. Baez stepped through ankle-deep water to get a closer look at the body. He could not see any clear indications of injury to the backside or legs of the deceased. However, the bloating of the body made it difficult to be sure. A large eagle tattoo ran across the victim's upper back. The rancid smell of decay was strong, even overcoming the smell of the Vicks rub. Baez retreated to solid ground to get clear of the smell.

"What do you think?" asked Mitchell.

"Hard to tell. Could be a simple drowning, or it could be something more sinister. Maybe a gator got him."

"I think he'd be more torn up if a gator had gotten him," responded Mitchell.

"True, but we haven't seen his upper torso yet."

Several minutes later, medical examiner Jeff Whitfield from the coroner's office arrived on the scene. Mitchell and Baez took several minutes to explain how the body was found and its positioning in the water.

"Any signs of foul play?" asked Whitfield.

"None so far," answered Mitchell. "We are waiting to see what we find when you pull him out."

"I will not be able to pull him out by myself. You two are going to have to help."

"What?" asked Baez. "Where is your assistant?"

"It's been a crazy busy day, and we are short-handed this week. Go to my van and get some rubber gloves. There are also a couple of extra plastic smocks to put on. Then bring the gurney back with you."

Baez gazed at Whitfield with an incredulous look. "This isn't getting done without your help," said Whitfield.

"Come on, Rick," said Mitchell. "Let's get suited up."

Mitchell and Baez walked to the coroner's van and pulled the gurney out from the back. They then peered into the plastic tote box and found the gloves and white plastic smocks. They each pulled the plastic smocks over their arms and tied them behind their backs. After putting on the rubber gloves, Baez and Mitchell pushed the gurney toward the water's edge. They lifted the gurney slightly as they walked to get over some rough and wet terrain.

"I need one of you on each side of the body," directed Whitfield. "I will lift the legs while you lift the upper torso. We will then slide him onto the gurney."

"This is not what I signed up for," grumbled Baez as he waded into the water. "Damn it!" he shouted.

"What is it?" asked Mitchell.

"I just sank in the muck, and water went into my boots."

Mitchell carefully stepped into the water, trying to avoid the same fate as Baez. It was no use. The bottom was soft, causing Mitchell's boots to be sucked into the muck. She could feel the warm water rushing down her calves and ankles, filling her boots with water.

"Stay there. I'll be right back," said Whitfield.

"Where the hell are you going?" shouted Baez.

"Given the body's condition, I don't think you will get a good hold. I'm going to get some straps I have in the van."

Baez rolled his eyes. "We'll just wait here in the swamp water for you."

Whitfield chuckled as he walked toward the van.

"Can you believe this guy?" asked Baez.

"Just shut up, Rick. He has no other help. Let's just get this over with, and then we can go shower."

Whitfield returned with two straps of heavy yellow nylon approximately six inches wide, with handles on each side. "Here," he said. "Slide these under the body and grab hold of the handles."

Baez bent down and pushed the straps under the body. His arms were in water up to his shoulders, and his face was so close to the body that the Vicks no longer helped. He could feel himself on the verge of gagging from the smell.

"Can you grab them?" yelled Baez.

"Not yet," answered Mitchell. "I can't feel anything. Push them further."

"I'm trying," grunted Baez. "There's a lot of mud underneath, and I'm already up to my armpits in this putrid soup."

"Just keep pushing it through," directed Whitfield.

Baez felt nauseous from the smell of rotting flesh. Beads of sweat lined his forehead and scalp beneath his dark hair. Holding his breath, he gave one final hard push on the straps.

"I've got one," shouted Mitchell. "Still trying to find the other one." Mitchell was also gagging from the smell.



She reached as far as she could by leaning into the body, only protected by the thin sheet of plastic smock. Finally, she found the handle of the second strap and quickly pulled it through the muck. Once she had it, Baez immediately stood up, turned around, and barfed his breakfast into the swampy water. The taste of half-digested food and sour stomach acid filled his mouth. The acid burned the back of his throat. Fresh vomit was now floating on top of the water.

“Are you okay, Detective?” asked Whitfield.

After spitting out as much vomit and stomach acid as he could, he answered. “Yeah, I’ll be fine.”

Still holding the handles, Mitchell stood up and turned away to breathe fresher air. After seeing Baez hurl his breakfast into the swamp, she had to make a stronger effort not to vomit herself.

As for Baez, he had to deal with the odor of decay, the musty swamp smell, water and muck in his boots, and vomit floating on the water around his legs.

“Okay, now I need you to lift the body with the straps, and I will lift the legs,” directed Whitfield. “We will then slide the body out, lift it, and place it on the gurney.”

Mitchell and Baez pulled up on the straps, lifting the torso high enough to walk it back out of the water. Baez didn’t think the smell could be any worse, but once the shoulders and head cleared the water, the putrid smell of rotting flesh seemed to double in strength. It was as though he could taste the mixture of rotten flesh mixed with vomit.

With some effort, they were able to get the body on the gurney lying face down. As soon as the body was secure, Baez and Mitchell stepped away. Both had boots full of water and muck. Baez didn’t know whether he should look for clean water to wash his mouth out or first empty the sludge in his boots. Since there was no ready source of fresh water, he emptied his boots first.

“Damn,” said Baez. “Look at my feet. Whoa! There’s a leech or slug or something that just fell out!”

After hearing that, Mitchell quickly sat down and took off her rubber boots. She didn’t find any leeches, but her socks were covered in sticky, smelly muck.

“Detectives, come look at this,” said Whitfield.

“I need to go get some water first,” replied Baez.

As Baez walked away to find some water, Mitchell shook off her feet as best she could, then walked over to the body. “What is it?” she asked.

“Well, even with the bloating, I can see that this victim’s head appears to have been severely beaten. There are also suspicious marks on the arms and shoulders.”

“So, you think this is a homicide victim?”

“Won’t know for sure until after the autopsy, but my early guess is that this person took one hell of a beating.”

After Baez returned, the three of them maneuvered the gurney over the mud and grass to the van. After helping Whitfield cover the body and load it into the van, Baez and Mitchell returned to their car to clean up. They found some disinfectant wipes in their car and wiped themselves off as best they could. Neither of them put their shoes back on. They could still smell the odor of decay on their clothing, and their pant legs were soaking wet. Mitchell drove them back to the police station.

Once at the station, they both went directly to the dressing rooms to shower and change. Baez took his pants and socks off and threw them in the garbage. He kept his underwear and shirt. Baez then took a long hot shower, allowing water to fill his mouth several times, then spitting it out. After his shower, he brushed his teeth until he could no longer taste a hint of vomit. He didn't have a complete change of clothing in his locker, so he put on his workout shorts and shirt, white socks, and sports coat.

Mitchell also took a long shower, taking extra care to clean her feet and toes. She washed her hair twice to ensure there was no lingering smell. Fortunately for her, she had a full change of clothing in her locker.

When Baez returned to his desk in the detective bureau, he attracted some attention. "What happened to you?" asked Detective Sergeant Leon Marquez.

"Oh, we had a dead body in the preserve area. It was messy."

"You're wearing gym shorts!" said Marquez.

"What do you want me to do? It's all I have. All I'm going to do is my reports and go home."

"Unless you get another dead body call," responded Marquez as he smiled and walked away.

Mitchell walked in shortly after, looked at Baez and laughed. "That's all you have?"

"No, I just thought I would go for a run after my report," said Baez sarcastically.

"I hope you brushed your teeth."

"Yes, I brushed my teeth. I also showered and washed my hair."

"That was some regurgitation out there. I thought you were going to hit the highway with it."

Baez flashed Mitchell a dirty look. "Very funny. You can just keep your mouth shut. You didn't get as close to that body as I did."

"Seriously? I had to reach under to grab those rings."

"And I'm the one who had to shove them under so you could reach them."

"Do we know who this guy is yet?" asked Mitchell.

"Nope. Just a naked guy in a swamp."

"Don't you find it strange that he was naked?"

"Somewhat. I'm more surprised the gators didn't get him. It looked like he had been in the water for several days. Do we have any reports of missing white males?"

"Nothing yet," replied Mitchell.

## Chapter 2

Baez left the office as soon as he finished writing his reports. When he got home, he believed he could still smell rotting human flesh on his skin. He quickly undressed, jumped in the shower, turned the water on as hot as he could withstand, and scrubbed himself with soap. After his shower, he put on his bathrobe, grabbed a diet soda from the fridge, and plunged himself into his leather recliner.

Baez still lived in the same two-bedroom stucco bungalow in the south Miami area. However, since returning from his extended leave, he had tried to make the home look more livable and inviting. The 72-inch big screen TV still hung on the living room wall for watching his sports, but the large Dolphins poster was gone from the wall. Some of his furniture had been recently upgraded, and Baez tried to keep his house tidy. He still relied on his regular maid to come in weekly to clean and paid her extra to do his laundry.

After getting settled, Baez picked up his cell phone and called his girlfriend, Carol Plum. Several months back, Baez had attended organized group meetups for divorced people. That is where he met Carol, a 34-year-old divorced woman. Carol is 5'8", average build, with light brown short hair, brown eyes, and a well-tanned complexion. Baez found her easy to talk to, and he liked her sense of humor. She also enjoyed hearing stories about his work. Carol worked as a surgery recovery nurse at Miami General Hospital. Hearing gross descriptions of crime scenes did not phase her.

"Hello, Rick," answered Carol.

"Hi, Carol. How are you doing?"

"I'm fine. Are you still at work?"

"No. I came home early to clean up."

"Clean up? What happened?"

"Not to be gross, but we found a partially decomposed body in the water today."

"Oooh, that had to be nasty."

"It was worse than that. Leah and I had to help the medical examiner retrieve the body. He didn't have anyone to help."

"I can imagine how fun that was."

"I'll spare you all the details, but it was embarrassing. I vomited from the smell while trying to get the body out of the water. I've never done that at a death scene before."

"I wouldn't worry about it too much, Rick. We've all had moments like that. The smell of human decay can be the worst."

"Of course, I ruined my clothes and didn't have a change of clothes at work, so I had to finish my day in my workout clothing. Everyone had a chuckle over that."

Carol laughed. "You must admit, it is kind of funny. Was it a man or woman?"

"It was a Hispanic male. Hard to tell, but he looked to be about 30 years old."

"Is it a homicide?"

"We don't know for sure, but he appeared to have injuries about his head and upper torso. We will know after the autopsy. Enough of that. How was your day?"

"Nothing special. Typical surgeries and no issues."

"Are we still on for Friday?"

"Yes, I'm looking forward to it."

"Good. I just wanted to check in and say hi. I'll see you Friday evening. Have a good night."

"Same to you, Rick."

While at home that evening having dinner with her partner, Grace, Mitchell talked about the body found in the swamp.

"It was horrible, Grace. Pulling a partially decayed body out of the water was bad enough. Then Rick had to barf into the water."

"Gross," said Grace.

"Yeah. And trying to grab hold of the body was difficult. It was bloated and slimy. I thought his skin was going to come off in my hands. And the smell."

"I've been to some terrible scenes," replied Grace, "but I've never had to help move the dead body."

"Normally, we don't do that either. But with the staffing shortages and the number of death cases recently, the coroner's office only had one person to send us."

"Sorry you had to do that."

"Sometimes it's just part of the job. I feel sorry for the medical examiner who has to autopsy the body. Here's a funny side to the story. Rick didn't have a change of clothing after we got back to the PD. He had to put on his workout clothes. And then he put his jacket on. He looked ridiculous."

Grace chuckled. "I can picture it. Rick has a way of getting into predicaments. How is he doing since coming back?"

"He's doing well. You know he took some vacation time added to his suspension. He wanted to spend more time with his family. I think he needed the time to reassess everything in his life. He even has a girlfriend now."

"Do I know her?"

"I doubt it. I haven't met her yet, and he hasn't talked much about her. All I know is her name is Carol, and they've been dating for a couple of months."

"You need to get more details."

"I will when the time is right. Oh, and Rick has really gotten himself into shape. I saw him at the gym this morning. He has lost weight and put on some muscle."

"Good for him. It sounds like he is completely recovered from his wounds."

“I think so. You know I still feel guilty over that.”

“I know you do, but it was not your fault. You did everything you could.”

“Yeah, I know, but.....”

Grace put her right hand on top of Leah’s and slightly squeezed. “I understand.”

“How did your shift go last night?” asked Mitchell.

“Not nearly as eventful as your day. The best call of the night was a domestic fight between a man and a woman in their twenties. Both were drunk, of course, and got into an argument over what movie to watch on Netflix. The guy ends up pulling the gal’s hair and slamming her head into the wall. She then turns around and kicks him square on in the balls. Dropped him like a rock. He was still on the floor holding his crotch when we got there.”

Mitchell started laughing. “Oh, that’s too funny.”

“He was moaning and crying like a baby.”

Mitchell laughed harder. “I wish I had seen that. What did you do?”

“We arrested him for assault. I considered her kick to be self-defense.”

“Good call.”

“So, we take him to the hospital to be treated, and one nurse tells me his right testicle was purple and swollen bigger than a baseball.”

Mitchell was now laughing hysterically.

“They had to give him some pain meds to get him to stop whining.”

“Oh my, what a story,” chuckled Mitchell. “Did you make that up?”

“Nope. All true. The guy should have known better.”

“Why is that?”

“I find out later the woman was a star soccer player in college. She knew how to kick.”

Mitchell laughed. “What an idiot. That’s great. I needed that. I’ll clean up the kitchen, and then why don’t we sit out back and relax with a glass of wine?”

“I’m all for that,” agreed Grace.

The following morning, Leah entered the detective bureau and found Baez at his desk. “Did you work out today?”

“No. Tuesdays and Thursdays are my off days.”

“What time did you get in?”

“About seven-thirty. I didn’t sleep well and thought I would start looking for any missing person report that might match our floater.”

“Any luck?”

“No.”

As Mitchell and Baez were talking, Detective Captain Jim Gonzalez walked over to Baez’s desk. “Good morning, detectives.”

“Good morning, sir,” replied Baez

“Good morning, Captain,” said Mitchell.

“Rick, would you mind standing up for me?”

“Why do you want me to stand up?”

“I was told you came to work yesterday with no pants on.”

Mitchell burst out laughing.

“Oh, my god,” chuckled Baez. “You too?”

“Leah, will you be sure Rick keeps his pants on today?”

“Yes, sir,” laughed Mitchell.

Baez shook his head as the captain walked away. “Everyone gets to have their laughs at my expense. Your day will come, Mitchell.”

“Oh, I’m sure it will.”

“You know you still stink, right?”

“Stop it,” snapped Mitchell as she turned and walked away.

Thirty minutes later, Mitchell was back at Baez’s desk. “We still need to go interview Julia Crumbach about the assault last week.”

“Oh, that’s right,” agreed Baez. “I forgot about that. Is her boyfriend still in jail?”

“Yes. Julia was too upset to go into great detail, so we agreed to re-interview her this week.”

“Yeah. You drive while I call the coroner’s office to see where they are on our autopsy.”

Once in the car, Baez called Jeff Whitfield. “Hey, Jeff, just calling to see if you’ve done the autopsy yet?”

“Which one?” asked Whitfield.

“The bloated one from the swamp! Did you forget already?”

“No, it’s just that we are swamped over here.”

“Swamped. Very funny. When do you expect to do it?”

“He’s scheduled to go later this afternoon.”

“Any identification of the body?”

“No, not yet. I’ll call you later today to tell you what I find.”

“Okay. Thanks, Jeff.”

“Didn’t sound like he had anything,” said Mitchell.

“No. He hasn’t done the autopsy and no identification yet.”

“Maybe he was a drifter passing through town.”

“Possibly, but he didn’t look like one to me.”

Mitchell pulled the Ford Explorer into the parking lot of the apartment building where Julia Crumbach lived. It was within a small complex of six beige, wood-sided buildings set in a U shape around a blacktopped parking lot. Each building included two stories, with four apartments on the ground floor and four on the top. Crumbach lived on the first level in the second building from the right, in apartment 204. Both detectives approached the front door. Baez rang the doorbell.

Julia Crumbach opened the door and invited the detectives inside. Both detectives could still see bruising on Crumbach's face, and her left arm was in a cast. A two-inch gash above her left eye was stitched shut and still healing. Crumbach's blonde hair was tangled, and her skin was pale. She was thin and wore a white tank top and high-cut red shorts. The apartment smelled of cigarettes.

The shades were drawn in the living room, creating a darkened atmosphere. A cloth tweed orange sofa was in the middle of the living room facing a TV on the opposite wall. Two brown patterned recliners were off to either side of the sofa, and a walnut-colored coffee table sat in the middle of the floor on worn brown carpeting. Mitchell noted the room was littered with several cups and used paper plates. An ashtray full of burned cigarette butts sat on the coffee table. Crumbach sat on the couch. Baez and Mitchell each took one of the recliners.

"How are you doing?" asked Mitchell.

"I'm feeling much better today, but I'm still sore," said Crumbach in a meek voice.

"We need to ask some more detailed questions about the assault last week. The details are important for court."

"I understand. What has Chris been charged with?"

"He was charged with Second Degree Assault and Domestic Violence. He could face up to fifteen years in prison."

Tears welled up in Crumbach's eyes.

"Are you okay?" asked Mitchell.

"Yes. The whole thing has just been a bad dream."

"Had Chris ever hit you before?"

"Twice, but never like this."

"Tell us when and what happened previously, Julia."

"About six months ago, Chris thought I was too friendly with the bartender at Chico's. He was angry with me as we drove home. Once we got here, the argument got heated. At one point, I told him he was crazy. He then hit me across the left cheek with his hand."

"Did you feel pain?" asked Mitchell.

"Oh, yes. I thought he broke my cheekbone."

"What happened then?"

"He grabbed me by the back of my hair and pushed me onto the bed. Then he held me facedown onto the pillow."

"Could you breathe?"

"No. I started screaming as best I could. I thought I was going to pass out. Finally, he let me up and told me never to call him crazy again."

"Did you call the police?" asked Baez.

"No, I was too scared."

"Were there any witnesses?"

"No, but my friend Lilly saw my bruised cheek the next day."

“We need to get her information before we leave,” advised Baez.

“When was the second time he attacked you?” continued Mitchell.

“About four weeks ago. I was mad at Chris for drinking so much. I hate it when he gets so drunk. We got into a fight, and he started pushing me. I wasn’t going to take it anymore, so I pushed him back. He then pushed me back onto the TV. I knocked the TV over as I fell backward. I hit my head on the wall and landed on the corner of the TV stand.”

“Were you injured?”

“Yes. My head hurt, and I had a nice bruise on my right hip.”

“Did he do anything else to you?”

“No. I think Chris was too drunk. He went to the bedroom and fell asleep on the bed. I slept on the couch.”

“Did you report this incident to the police?” Baez asked again.

“No.”

“Why didn’t you report these assaults?”

“I don’t know. I guess because when Chris isn’t drinking, he is a sweet guy. And I didn’t want to get him into trouble.”

“A guy who beats his girlfriend is not a sweet guy,” replied Baez.

Crumbach looked down. “Yeah, I know.”

Mitchell continued. “Now tell us what happened last Friday.”

“It was Friday night, so Chris and I went out to get some food and drinks at the Purple Rockin’ Blues on 12<sup>th</sup> Street.”

“Purple Rockin’ Blues?”

“Yeah. It’s a bar that serves food and has dancing on weekends. They play blues and rock and roll music.”

“Go on.”

“As so often happens, Chris started drinking too much. It was unfortunate, as we were having a great time. We met some people there, and we were partying, dancing, and singing. Well, the more Chris drank, the meaner he got. He was jealous of the attention I was getting from some other guys. It was crazy, as other women were there, and we were all joking around. I could see Chris getting that angry look in his eye, so I tried to settle things down.”

“What happened then?”

“I think it was around eleven o’clock when Chris had enough. He grabbed me by the arm and said, we’re getting out of here.”

“Go on.”

“So, we left, and I insisted on driving, but he wouldn’t let me. He told me to shut the “f” up and get in the car. I shouldn’t have, but I did because I was afraid of his behavior. It was a scary ride home, as he had trouble staying in his lane. Once we got home, he threw



the keys across the room and told me to go into the bedroom. Well, I refused, as I was afraid of what he would do.”

Crumbach paused. Her eyes again filled with tears.

“It’s okay,” assured Mitchell. “You are safe now, and with what you are telling us, he will not be getting out of jail.”

Mitchell handed Crumbach a tissue for her to blow her nose. Crumbach then continued.

“That’s when Chris came at me. I’d never seen him so angry. He tried to push me down the hallway to the bedroom, but I resisted as hard as I could. He was just too strong. Chris grabbed a glass from somewhere and walloped me on the head. I could feel the blood running down my face as I stumbled backward. I then tried to run past him to escape.”

Crumbach paused.

“You’re doing fine,” said Mitchell.

“That’s when he grabbed me and threw me into the bathroom so hard that I stumbled,” cried Crumbach. Mitchell handed her another tissue.

“Is that when you broke your arm?”

“Yes,” Crumbach said softly through sobs. “I tried to stop my fall with my arm, but when I hit the bathtub, I heard a crack and extreme pain shot through my arm.”

“Did the assault stop?”

“No. Chris came into the bathroom and hit me with his fists. He wouldn’t stop.”

“Where did he hit you?”

“All over my head and shoulders.”

“When did he stop?”

“I guess our neighbor heard the commotion because he came in to see what was going on.”

“Is that when Chris stopped?”

“Yes. I heard Chris tell Oscar that I had fallen in the bathroom. But Oscar did not believe him, and he called the police.”

“We have the hospital’s report, Julia,” advised Mitchell. “It says you suffered a head concussion, a severe cut above your left eye, a broken left arm, and multiple contusions about your head, shoulders, and arms. Does that sound about right?”

“Yes, those were all my injuries.”

“We understand they kept you overnight. Is that correct?”

“Yes.”

“Thank you, Julia. These details will help us convict Chris for assaulting you. We got a detailed witness statement from Oscar on Friday night, and he confirmed what you told us.”

“Thank you, Detectives.”

“Are you going to be living here?” asked Baez.

“Not for long. Lilly said I could move in with her.”

“That’s probably a good idea. You don’t need the memories of this place.”

After saying their goodbyes, Mitchell and Baez made their way back to the police department. “She’s going to make an excellent witness,” said Baez.

“I agree.”

Back at the department, Baez’s cell phone rang. “Detective Baez.”

“Rick, it’s Jeff with the coroner’s office. I just completed the autopsy on your floater.”

“Great, what have you got?”

“I’d have to say you have a homicide on your hands. There were multiple blunt force injuries about the head, shoulders, and back. My guess is someone beat this poor man to death.”

“Can’t we just rule it a suicide?”

Whitfield laughed. “I’m afraid not, Detective. You’re going to have to do some work on this one.”

“Any sign of drugs or alcohol?”

“I took tissue and blood samples, but those won’t be analyzed for a few days.”

“How about identification?”

“We don’t have anything, but I’ll turn the fingerprints and DNA sample into forensics. Maybe they can figure out who he is.”

“What about the tattoos?”

“He had several on both arms that were hard to distinguish. I didn’t find any names. The large tattoo on his back was an eagle with wings spread.”

“That’s distinguishing.”

“Yes, it is.”

“Thank you, Jeff.”

Mitchell overheard part of the conversation. “Another murder, eh?”

“Yep, our week just got busier. I will check with records to see if any missing person reports came in overnight.”

“Sounds good. I’ll type up the report on our interview with Julia.”

“Her boyfriend likes to beat people up. Maybe we can pin this murder on him.”

Mitchell just smiled.

Baez scoured the police records from the last 24 hours. There was still no report of a missing person.

“Leah!” barked Baez. “Have there been any news reports on our dead floater?”

“Not that I know of.”

“I think we should put out a press release describing our deceased and asking anyone with information to come forward. The press loves a good unidentified dead body story.”

“I like the idea,” agreed Mitchell. “They will want to talk to someone about it.”

“I’ll try to get this on the five o’clock news.”

Baez worked on a press release, vaguely describing the circumstances. He provided more detail on the description of the body, hoping someone would recognize the victim.

He hoped the tattoos on the victim's arms and the eagle tattoo on his back would prompt someone to call. After reviewing the press release, Sgt. Marquez told Baez he would have to set up a time to meet with interested reporters.

"You want me to do a press conference?"

"Yes," said Sgt. Marquez. "There will be a lot of interest, and you will be overwhelmed with calls if you do not set up a time to answer questions. You know the drill."

"Sure. I was just hoping I could get by with just a release."

"Not on something like this. An unknown dead body found in the swamp? The media will eat this up. We have five major TV outlets in this region and multiple newspapers. They will want a face attached to this story. In a half-hour, you can be done with it."

"You're right."

"I will call one of our PIOs to help you set it up for four-thirty," said Sgt. Marquez. "This will get it in just before the evening news."