

# **Silent Waters**

## **Murder on Boulder Creek**

**Crime Thriller**

**by**

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## Chapter 1

“Why are you doing this to me?” screamed Della. “I’m freezing and hungry!”

“I want to know how much you can take,” replied the man wearing a white hood while looking through the metal grate above.

“I hate you! Get me out of here!” Della shouted as she looked up through the black metal grate that imprisoned her in the eight-by-10-foot wood-lined walled enclosure. She estimated the walls to be about eight feet tall. They were made of thick wooden timbers designed to prevent escape and limit her screams from being heard outside the chamber. Her only sight from the chamber was through the two-by-three-foot opening at the top, covered by the black grate. In her estimate, the bars on the grate were approximately three inches apart. Della could not tell which way was north, south, east, or west. One sixty-watt light bulb hung through the grate, providing her with light whenever her captor turned it on. In the middle of the concrete floor was a five-inch round drain.

The only furniture provided was a small metal cot with a thin mattress along one wall and a thick wooden chair sitting in a corner. The chair had wide wooden arms on each side with buckled leather straps attached, often used to buckle her to the chair for what he called “experiments.” Similar ankle straps were attached to the front legs of the chair. In the middle of the opposite wall across from the bed was a two-foot-wide solid metal door. In one upper corner was a small camera pointing into the room toward the chair. A metal bucket sat in the opposite corner and served as Della’s toilet. Toilet paper was provided, but there was nothing with which to wash her hands. The bucket was only emptied every

four to five days. The smell reminded Della of the old wooden outhouses used in state parks when camping with her parents as a little girl.

Della did not know how long she had been a prisoner and could not remember how she got here. She estimated she had been captive for approximately thirty-some days. Della could not distinguish day from night. Her last memory was being at a bar with a young male. From there, everything became hazy, like trying to look through a thick fog. Della referred to her place of containment as her dungeon. There were times she thought of ways to overtake her captor whenever he entered the dungeon. At other times, her disorientation and depression made thoughts of escape challenging to comprehend. Thoughts of suicide sometimes crept into Della's head, although she didn't know how she would go about killing herself.

The temperature in the room was cold. Della believed it to be about 60 degrees most of the time. Of course, 60 degrees would feel more like freezing whenever he sprayed her with water. The cotton shirt and shorts provided were no comfort against the cold. Della would sometimes lie in bed under the only blanket, shivering to the point of making it difficult to sleep.

Della was fed minimal food, usually a dry peanut butter sandwich with bottled water once a day. She would sometimes get a sandwich of lunch meat, if lucky. The sandwiches were relatively dry without mayonnaise or other condiments, but the meat was a refreshing change. To deliver the food, a bucket would be lowered into the room containing whatever sandwich was served that day. It was the same type of metal bucket used as her toilet. She hoped the buckets were never switched out for one another. Most of the time, she would drink all the water. At other times, she would save a small amount for cleaning her hands and face.

"You are not leaving here until you transition," he told Della.

“Transition to what?”

“Back to who you really are, Amy.”

“My name is not Amy. You want me to go crazy, don’t you?”

“I never said that.”

“I’m sure people are looking for me.”

“What people?”

“The police.”

“No one has even reported you missing.”

Della knew he was probably right, which further depressed her. At seventeen, she had run away from her home in Erie, Pennsylvania. Now nineteen, Della was no longer a juvenile runaway, but her mother had little idea where she was. She had only been in Boulder, Colorado, for a couple of weeks before being imprisoned in a hell-hole wooden room. She doubted anyone even knew she was missing.

“What day is this?” Della asked.

“What does it matter? You no longer have days. You only have time, so you might as well make the most of what you have left.”

“What does that mean?”

Without answering, he stared at Della through the metal grate for several seconds. She stared back. He then got up and left. The lightbulb in her wooden tomb shut off. Della was left in total darkness. She had no way of knowing what time it was or whether it was day or night. Della sat on the edge of the metal-framed bed and listened. She knew there was another woman somewhere nearby. Sometimes, she would hear muffled screaming from another room, possibly another wooden dungeon like hers. The voice was that of a female. Della tried to call out to the other woman.

“Hello,” she shouted. “Can you hear me?”

Della was afraid to call out too loudly for fear of her captor hearing her and punishing her for it. Della called out again. Still no response. *She's probably too afraid to respond*, thought Della. *Who is she? Does she have blond hair like me? Is she in a similar room?*

Della slowly lay down on the bed and positioned herself in a fetal position. She pulled the musty blanket to her neck as tears trickled down her cheeks. *How did I get into this situation?*

## Chapter 2

Boulder Detective Caroline Shaw arrived at the police department on an unseasonably warm Tuesday morning, May 9<sup>th</sup>, at 8:10 am. As usual, she walked upstairs to the break room to get a coffee from the vending machine before returning downstairs to her desk in the Detective Bureau. Her first order of business was to see if any fresh cases had landed on her desk. Before she could even set her coffee down, Detective Sergeant Luca Martinez walked by.

“Come see me in my office right now,” ordered Martinez.

“What is it?” responded Shaw.

“We have a dead body.”

Detective Shaw quickly followed the sergeant into his office. “What have we got?” asked Shaw.

“Patrol got a report of a female body found in Eben G. Fine Park this morning. One of our transients called it in. Patrol officers are there now securing the scene. I’d like you and Nichols to respond. See what we have there.”

“Sure thing,” responded Shaw. “Is it a homicide?”

“Right now, I don’t know. I only know that we have a confirmed dead female.”

“Got it,” said Shaw as she walked out and headed toward the desk of Detective Tom Nichols. Nichols was not at his desk. Shaw retrieved her cell phone and called him.

“Hey Caro, what’s up?” answered Nichols.

“Where are you?” asked Shaw.

“I’m downstairs talkin’ trash with some patrol guys. Why?”

“We have a dead female body at Eben G. Fine. Martinez put us on the case.”

“Okay, I’ll be right up.”

“Gotta go. Dead female found in Eben G. Fine,” said Nichols to no one in particular as he walked away. Nichols hustled to the detective bureau, where he met Detective Shaw.

“You ready?” asked Shaw.

“Geez, give me a minute. I need to find my notepad and put my jacket on.”

Shaw stood and watched as Nichols fumbled around on his desk until he found his notepad under some spread-out reports. He then grabbed his blue sports coat off the back of his chair and put it on. “Now I’m ready,” Nichols said.

Shaw rolled her eyes and led the way out of the building to her assigned detective car, a white Ford Explorer. It was a simple drive to Eben G. Fine Park. All Shaw had to do was head due west on Arapahoe from 33<sup>rd</sup> Street and follow it to the west side of town (the police department is on 33<sup>rd</sup> Street, just north of Arapahoe).

Boulder, Colorado, is a vibrant and picturesque town nestled at the foothills of the Rocky Mountains 25 miles northwest of Denver. It is known for its stunning beauty and active lifestyle. Boulder sits at an elevation of approximately 5,400 feet, surrounded by beautiful open space with plenty of parks and trails. Boulder’s skyline is partially defined by the Flatirons, iconic rock formations southwest of the city. The town’s location is ideal for outdoor enthusiasts for hiking, biking, running and various other outdoor activities. The University of Colorado sits in the center of town, creating youthful energy and a vibrant academic atmosphere in the city. Boulder also has a thriving cultural scene and hosts various festivals and events throughout the year.

Eben G. Fine Park is located off Arapahoe Avenue on the far western side of Boulder, snuggled along Boulder Creek, which flows east from the mountains. The tree-lined park has a wide-open area for picnicking, playing frisbee, or lounging. Along the park’s



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north boundary runs Boulder Creek, nestled between tall trees, many of them majestic maples and cottonwoods. A paved walkway and bike trail run parallel to the meandering creek that gurgles and babbles as it cascades over rocky boulders. This trail continues through Boulder and connects with other walkways and bike trails. It is very popular with heavy traffic in the summer. In high water runoff, the creek provides some whitewater for tubers and kayakers. In Eben G. Fine Park, the city has created a unique whitewater play park for kayakers and tubers to enjoy. During calmer times, people can often be seen wading in the cool waters of the creek.

Many enjoy the park, but it's also known as a popular spot for the homeless, often referred to as transients, especially during the warmer months. While mostly peaceful, the transients can sometimes cause problems after drinking too much or being too aggressive in asking for money. Therefore, the Boulder Police frequently patrol the area.

Shaw and Nichols arrived at the park at 8:38 am. They could see three officers and a patrol sergeant congregated near the creek bed on the far west side of the park. Yellow crime scene tape cordoned off an area along the creek, and several bystanders were milling around. Nichols grabbed the camera from the backseat. They exited the car and walked toward the gathering, approximately 300 feet away. As they walked up, Patrol Sergeant Jean Wilson stepped forward to greet them.

“Hi, Jean,” said Nichols. “What have we got here?”

“Not sure,” responded Wilson. “Deceased young white female. She doesn't look to be in great shape. May have been dead for a while.”

“Any indication of the cause of death?” asked Shaw.

“Possible suicide.”

“Why do you say that?”

“The first officer on the scene checked her vitals. He saw that her right wrist had been sliced.”

Detective Shaw shook her head. “Who found her?”

“One of our transient friends, Chris Shilling. He goes by the nickname of Grizzly.”

“Ah, I remember Grizzly from my patrol days,” offered Nichols. “Even arrested him a few times on minor stuff. You know why they call him Grizzly, right?”

“Yeah, because he’s so hairy,” answered Wilson.

“He sure is,” said Nichols. “He’s got hair all down his back, his chest, beard, he has it all. When he hasn’t showered in a while, that hair carries quite an odor.”

“Okay, that’s enough about his hair and odor,” snapped Shaw. “What did he tell you?”

Sgt. Wilson continued. “He told me he had gone down to the creek a little after seven this morning to splash some water on his face when he came upon our victim. He said her legs and lower body were in the water, with her head and upper body on the rocks. Grizzly pulled her out of the water to check on her and found her dead.”

“Great,” said Nichols. “So, we have a contaminated crime scene.”

“Most people would have checked on her,” responded Shaw.

“Officer West was the first to respond,” continued Wilson. “He checked her vitals and immediately knew she had been dead for some time. That’s when he saw her right wrist had been cut. The coroner has been called, and someone is en route.”

“Okay, let’s look the body over and get some pictures,” suggested Shaw.

“I’ve got the camera,” replied Nichols. “You look things over, and I will take the photos.”

Shaw stood back while Nichols took multiple photographs of the body and surrounding area from various angles. Once he finished taking overall pictures of the victim and crime scene, Shaw moved in to examine the body. Shaw noted the victim appeared to have been dead for at least several hours. She could see the cut on the victim's right wrist but did not want to move the body to check the left wrist tucked under the victim's left side.

The victim appeared to be a young white female, possibly around twenty. She had long blond hair and pale skin. Shaw estimated her height to be between five-foot-four inches and five-foot-six inches. The victim was very thin, and her face had an emaciated look. *This woman was not in great health*, thought Shaw. On the right hand, Shaw noticed the fingernails were broken and worn.

"Her right hand may have been damaged from the rocks," suggested Shaw. "Be sure to get some photos of her hand."

"I will," responded Nichols.

Shaw noted the victim was scantily dressed in a gray T-shirt and white shorts. She did not have any shoes on. While it was a warm day, Shaw did not believe the women had dressed appropriately for the weather, especially for the night or early morning hours.

Shaw then searched around the body, looking for anything out of the ordinary. Other than the body, Shaw found nothing unusual. Once Nichols finished taking photos, Shaw suggested they talk to Grizzly. They both approached Chris Shilling, commonly known as Grizzly, sitting at a nearby picnic table with a patrol officer. Grizzly wore a red plaid flannel long-sleeved shirt and well-worn blue jeans. A pair of dirty brown construction boots adorned his feet. He wore a blue bandana on his head of thick, long, dark hair. Underneath the bandana, his hair was tied back in a ponytail. A dense, bushy beard covered the lower half of his face and hung

down below his neckline. He looked to be middle-aged. Shaw detected the body odor Nichols had mentioned as she got closer.

“Hello, Chris,” said Shaw.

“Just call me Grizzly,” Shilling replied.

“Okay, Grizzly. I’m Detective Caro Shaw, and this is Detective Tom Nichols. We understand you found our victim this morning.”

“I did.”

“How did you find her?”

“I was just going down to the creek, like I usually do in the morning, to clean up some. When I got there, I found this woman lying in the creek. I pulled her out to check on her and found she had already drowned.”

Shaw believed she could detect an odor of alcohol on Grizzly’s breath. It was tough to distinguish from the body odor. “Why do you think she drowned?”

“She was face down at the edge of the creek when I found her.”

“What did you do next?” asked Shaw as Nichols scribbled notes in his notebook.

“I pulled her out.”

“You pulled her out of the creek after you determined she was dead?”

“No, I pulled her out first. She was cold and not breathing.”

“Did you see anything else in the water?”

“No.”

“What else did you touch?”

“I didn’t touch anything else on her. I just grabbed her arms and pulled her out onto the rocks.”

“Who else was with you?”

“No one.”

“Did you see anyone else in the park?”

“Umm, just a few people walking by on the path.”

“Who were they?”

“I don’t know. Just some people. There are usually people on the path in the morning.”

“Didn’t they see the body?”

“I guess not. I didn’t see her until I got to the creek.”

“Do you know this woman?” continued Shaw.

“No.”

“Have you ever seen her before?”

“Not that I remember.”

“How much have you had to drink today?”

Grizzly looked at Shaw for several seconds. “Nothing.”

“I can smell alcohol on your breath.”

“I haven’t had anything today.”

“Yesterday?”

“Yeah, I was drinking yesterday. Am I in trouble?”

“No, not at all,” assured Shaw. “We just need to know all the facts. When did you last have a drink?”

“Last night sometime.”

“Before or after midnight?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you feel drunk right now?”

“No, I’m fine.”

“Do you know what time you found the woman?”

“Early. Probably around seven.”

“Did you take anything off the woman?”

“No. Why are you asking me these questions? All I did was find the body.”

“We are just being thorough. The more information we have, the better our investigation will go. We appreciate you reporting this. Thank you.”

Grizzly nodded.

“Here is my card. If you think of anything else, please call me. Every bit of information may be important.”

“Okay.”

“Is that your backpack?” interjected Nichols as he pointed to a medium-sized blue backpack on the picnic table.

“Yeah.”

“Do you mind if we look inside just to be thorough?”

“You want to search my backpack?”

“Just look inside, that’s all.”

Grizzly reached over and grabbed the pack. He then handed it to Nichols. Nichols unzipped the top and looked in. He found miscellaneous items inside, including cigarettes, a half-empty bottle of Jack Daniels, a half loaf of bread, a couple of dirty T-shirts, a folding jackknife, and some matches.

“You going to bust me for an open container?”

Nichols looked at Grizzly. “No, we don’t care about your open bottle of whiskey. We’re just making sure you had nothing to do with this woman’s death. Your cooperation is appreciated.”

Grizzly nodded.

“Where did you go to call the police?” asked Nichols.

“I used my cell phone.”

“I don’t see any cell phone in here.”

Grizzly reached into his shirt pocket, pulled out a small cell phone, and waved it at Nichols.

“That’s your cell phone?”

“Sure is. Government-issued.”

“May I see it?” asked Nichols. Grizzly handed Nichols the phone.

Nichols checked the phone log and found a call to 911. He then handed the phone back to Grizzly and thanked him. “Where are your bedroll, jacket, and other items?”

“I keep them stashed where I sleep. And I don’t tell anyone where that is. I’ve lost too many items over the years.”

“I understand,” nodded Nichols. He then turned to Shaw. “I don’t have anything else.”

Shaw looked at Grizzly. “You are free to go now. Thanks again.”

“I can leave?”

“Yes, you may leave now.”

Grizzly stood up, grabbed his backpack, and walked away.

“I think he’s our guy,” said Nichols.

“Huh?” responded Shaw.

Nichols laughed. “I’m being sarcastic. Grizzly is not the type to do something like this. Besides, he wouldn’t have stuck around if he was involved.”

“I agree. It looks like the coroner has arrived. Let’s go see what he finds.”

Shaw and Nichols returned to the creek’s edge where the body lay. The coroner, Ron Larsen, was a large, middle-aged white male with dark hair parted and combed to the left. A thick, dark mustache adorned his upper lip. He stood at six-foot-two with a large physique, and black-framed glasses sat on the bridge of his nose. His eyes were dark brown, almost black. Larsen wore dark pants and a blue nylon windbreaker with “Coroner” emblazoned across the back. Blue latex gloves covered his hands.

“Good morning, Ron,” said Detective Shaw as she walked up beside him. Nichols remained quiet as he looked over the body.

“Homicide?” asked Larsen.

“We don’t know, but there is a cut on her right wrist,” answered Shaw.

“Do I need to take pictures?”

“No, Tom took plenty from all angles.”

“Good. Let’s get her out of here and onto the gurney.”

Shaw and Nichols stepped forward to help Larsen lift the woman up and out of the water. The body was partially stiff, indicating rigor mortice, the stiffening of the muscles, had already begun. Shaw estimated the victim had been dead for at least several hours. Once they got her out, they lifted her onto the gurney.

“Look at this,” said Nichols. “Her left wrist is also cut. She must have been very intent on killing herself.”

“Maybe,” responded Larsen. “But I find it strange there is very little blood.”

“It probably washed out in the creek,” Nichols replied.

“Possibly, but I would still expect more blood, especially on her clothing. It would be faded, but there should be some blood stains somewhere. I’ll know more when I get her to the morgue and do a thorough inspection and autopsy.”

Once Larsen had the body covered and strapped down, he wheeled it toward his waiting van. Two nearby patrol officers assisted Larsen in loading the body.

Shaw and Nichols then took the time to search the rocks and water where the body had been found. Neither of them could find anything of evidentiary value. They both noted that no blood was visible on any of the rocks or surrounding dirt.

“If only these waters could talk,” pondered Nichols.

“That would be nice,” agreed Shaw as they stood listening to the bubbling water flow by.

As they were completing their search, Detective Commander Stella Greenberg arrived on the scene. Greenberg started with the Boulder PD when she was twenty-four years old. She was now fifty-four and had been the detective commander for the past three years. Her short, brown, wavy hair covered her ears, and she wore her typical outfit, a women’s business suit. Today, she was in gray. Under the jacket, she wore a white open-neck blouse. As always, Greenberg wore a solid gold pendant around her neck. The



pendant comprised three circles of gold, each engraved with the name of one of her three children. “What have we got? Please tell me it’s a simple drowning.”

“I’m afraid we can’t tell you that, Commander,” replied Nichols. “We don’t know what we have. Our victim was found by a transient, Grizzly, who said he stumbled across the body this morning. There were no obvious signs of trauma other than a deep cut on both wrists.”

“Sad, but good. All we need is another homicide on the creek path. Boulder would go crazy.”

“We aren’t so sure this is a suicide,” advised Shaw. “There’s no visible blood anywhere. Larsen believes there should have been some blood evidence, especially on the clothing.”

“She was found in the water. The blood evidence is likely gone,” replied Greenberg. Neither Shaw nor Nichols replied. “Let me know as soon as the coroner has a finding.”

“We will,” Shaw assured her.

It was 10:45 am by the time Shaw and Nichols had completed their investigation at the scene. “Have you had breakfast yet?” asked Nichols.

“I usually only have coffee in the morning.”

“Well, it’s almost eleven already. It will be eleven-thirty by the time we get there and get served. You can call it lunch. Let’s go to the Village Coffee Shop.”

Shaw chuckled. “Yeah, I am getting a little hungry, but not for breakfast food.”

“You know they serve lunch food as well, right?”

“Of course. I’ve been there before.”

“Great, then you know the way.”

Shaw chuckled again at the insinuation that she might not have known where the iconic and Boulder favorite Village Coffee Shop is located. It is centrally located on Folsom Street, just north

of Arapahoe Avenue. Anyone in Boulder for any length of time knows of the Village Coffee Shop. Its website advertises itself as “890 square feet of reality, surrounded by Boulder.” It is the place to go for comfort food, and the servings are plentiful. Fluffy pancakes are one of their specialties. The lunch menu consists primarily of burgers and a variety of sandwiches.

Before leaving, Shaw and Nichols walked around the park to see if they could find anything out of place or suspicious. Finding nothing, they packed up their equipment and headed toward the Village Coffee Shop. Shaw pulled the Explorer into the parking lot and quickly found a parking space. “There doesn’t seem to be many people here today.”

“It’s only eleven-twenty,” laughed Nichols. “The perfect time between the breakfast crowd and the lunch crowd. By noon, it will be hard to find a table.”

They both entered the small restaurant and found several tables available. As cops often do, they chose a table in the back that provided a view of the entire restaurant and the front door.

A waitress, a forty-something motherly-looking type, handed each of them a menu. “Hi, Tom. How are things going today?”

“Well, it’s only eleven-thirty, and we’ve already responded to a dead body call,” answered Nichols.

“Oh. That doesn’t sound good.”

“No, it’s been a busy morning. We’ve worked up an appetite.”

“Do you know what you want already?”

“I do.”

“I’m going to need a minute to look over the menu,” said Shaw.

Nichols interrupted. “Mary, this is my partner in crime, Detective Caroline Shaw. We call her Caro for short. Caro, this is Mary, the best waitress in Boulder.”

“Pleased to meet you,” said Mary.

“Same here,” replied Shaw. “I’ve been here a few times.”

“You look somewhat familiar.”

“She’s also been on TV a few times,” announced Nichols. “Caro’s been on some major cases recently.”

Mary smiled. “Would you like something to drink?”

“Coffee, please,” replied Shaw.

“Iced tea for me,” said Nichols.

After Mary walked away, Shaw looked at Nichols. “You didn’t have to tell her I’ve been on TV. That’s not something I advertise.”

“No, but that’s where she might have seen you.”

“Or maybe when I’ve been here before.”

Nichols changed the subject. “I have a question for you.”

“Yeah, what?”

“Why do you go by Caro?” asked Nichols, emphasizing the “o” at the end. “Isn’t it usually Carol? Caro reminds me of the syrup my mom used when I was a kid. It was clear and called Caro syrup.”

Shaw looked at Nichols with a squint in her eyes. “The syrup is Karo, with a K.”

“Whatever,” said Nichols. “Why Caro, with a C?”

“Not that it matters, but my father called me Caro for short when I was growing up. He always left off the L at the end. It caught on, and I came to like it as well.”

“Okay,” shrugged Nichols. “I thought maybe you didn’t know how to spell Carol.”

“If that was a joke, it wasn’t funny,” smirked Shaw.

Just then, Mary walked up with the drinks. “Do you two know what you’d like?”

“I will take the tuna melt, please,” replied Shaw.

“And I will have the Spanish omelet with jalapenos. And please bring me two blueberry pancakes instead of the toast,” said Nichols.

“Got it,” replied Mary as she turned and walked away.

“You must be hungry,” said Shaw.

“Well, we didn’t get breakfast. And it’s hard not to order the pancakes here.”

Once their food was served, Shaw and Nichols continued to make small talk. Neither cared to talk of the dead body while eating.

Detective Caroline Shaw was a thirty-seven-year-old white female, five-foot-ten, with a slim build. She had medium-length dark blond, almost brown hair, which she pulled back and pinned in a French twist while at work. Her eyes were a bright blue, adding a touch of vibrancy to her overall look. Given her athletic nature, she possessed a toned physique with well-defined muscles. Her size and posture exuded confidence and poise. While growing up in Fort Wayne, Indiana, Shaw played basketball and softball in high school. She was talented enough at softball to play at the collegiate level at Indiana University. After graduating, Shaw moved out west for a change of scenery. She had always been interested in law enforcement, and when she found out the Boulder Police Department was hiring, she applied. They hired her at twenty-three years old.

Prior to becoming a detective, Shaw worked as a patrol officer. While working on patrol, she started dating a fellow patrol officer, Dan Milton, and after eight months, they married. They were happy for several years, but both seemed more dedicated to their work than each other. After six years together, they decided it would be better to divorce. It was soon after the divorce when Shaw was promoted to detective. She has been a detective for the last six years. For the first four years as a detective, Shaw worked

on sexual assaults. After much success, Shaw transferred into aggravated assault and homicide. Several years after the divorce, her ex-husband, Dan Milton, was one of the first responders to Boulder's supermarket mass shooting that became national news. After the shooting, Milton struggled with post-traumatic stress and guilt over the death of one of the responding officers, who was also a close friend. He left the Boulder Police Department approximately eight months after the tragic shooting. He was now working as a realtor in Arvada, about 20 miles south of Boulder. Shaw still occasionally talked to him but hadn't seen him in over a year.

Detective Tom Nichols was a thirty-four-year-old white male, six feet tall and had a medium build. He sported shortcut brown hair that was combed to the right. His eyes were dark brown, and he had a tanned complexion, owing to his mother being Hispanic. Nichols typically wore short-sleeved polo shirts with either a sports jacket or a light windbreaker. On his left wrist, he always wore a shiny gold watch.

Nichols grew up in Denver and studied criminal justice for two years at Front Range Community College. After earning his associate degree, Nichols worked as a security guard for a local manufacturing company. While working, he put himself through the police academy at Arapahoe Community College. At twenty-four, the Boulder Police Department hired him. At twenty-five, he married his longtime girlfriend, Kristin, after she became pregnant with their son, Brian, who was now nine. Three years later, Tom and Kristin welcomed a baby girl into the family. They named her Lisa. Nichols had now been a detective for three years. Tom was currently assigned as a general detective, which meant he could be assigned to any type of case as needed. However, this was the first potential homicide he had ever been assigned to assist with.

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After finishing their meal and paying, Shaw and Nichols left the coffee shop and drove back to the police department. They knew they had a lot of work ahead of them.